

Students with Individual Education Plans- The Role of the School Counselor

Missouri School Counselor Association Position Paper (2015)

School counselors strive to assist all students, including those with disabilities. A school district's comprehensive school counseling program is intended to meet the needs of all students, including those identified by the Missouri State Plan for Special Education as well as Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act. School counselors are not responsible for the special education process coordination.

The Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Program does not allow for school counselors providing long-term counseling/therapy to students as part of the school counselor's role. Many districts do not approve of school counselors administering therapy to students, and many school counselors are not licensed to provide such services. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) lists the following as inappropriate responsibilities for the professional school counselor: providing long-term therapy; serving in any supervisory capacity relating to the implementation of the IEP; serving as the school district representative for the team writing the IEP; coordinating, and writing or supervising the implementation of the IEP; or cognitive testing duties.

School counselors should recognize their strengths and limitations in working with students with disabilities. The Missouri State Plan for Special Education defines personnel standards for those positions that provide special education support services. According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, school counselors may be partially funded by special education to provide certain services not routinely offered to the entire school population. It is the responsibility of the school district to review applicable practices, transcripts and codes of ethics to determine if their counselors are qualified to deliver special education services. If a school counselor is providing services for special education outside of the scope of the comprehensive school counseling program, partial funding for that counselor's position should be paid for by special education funds.

The school counselor is responsible for adapting, as needed, the services provided in the comprehensive school counseling program to meet the needs of all students, including those with Individual Education Plans. The school counselor's role is to work with students individually, in group settings, in the special education class setting, and in the regular classroom. The school counselor provides school counseling curriculum lessons and provides and offers individual and/or group counseling to all students, including those with disabilities.

School counselors have a professional obligation to refer to outside agencies or therapists for long-term therapy and therefore should not be written into an IEP as the provider for such therapy services. If the IEP team feels it is necessary to include the school counselor's services in the IEP, a general statement might be included, such as: ["The student will have access to the school counselor through small group or individual counseling."] In the ASCA Ethical Standards, it states that school counselors make referrals when necessary or appropriate to outside resources for student and/or family counseling support. It is important for the district to refer the student to outside resources when deemed appropriate. If the school counselor is providing services beyond their scope of training or job description, the district could be open to legal issues or concerns. Appropriate referrals may necessitate informing both parents/guardians and students of applicable resources and making proper plans for transitions with minimal interruption of services. Students, and/or parents/guardians, retain the right to discontinue the counseling relationship at any time. School counselors are aware of and utilize related professionals, organizations and other resources to which the student may be referred.

The school counselor takes an active role by advocating for students with special needs, collaborating with other professionals, and providing a comprehensive school guidance program for all students. School counselors should encourage family involvement; consult and collaborate with staff and families to understand the special needs of a student and the adaptations and modifications needed to assist the student; contribute to the school's multidisciplinary team to identify students who may need to be assessed to determine special education eligibility; and provide assistance with academic and transition plans for students in the IEP as appropriate. The school counselor provides comprehensive school counseling services for all students. If school counselors are written into IEP's for on-going counseling services for specific students, this would limit their ability to provide services for all students.

The following guidelines are taken from page 38 of the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program Manual:

<http://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/SectionIII.pdf>

C. Completing and managing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and meeting other special education requirements

- School counselors should not function as case managers for students with special needs.
- School counselors could be members of the team involved in the diagnostic aspects of the IEP. However, they should not be responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of the IEP or the Individualized Vocational Education Plan unless they are funded by special education or by vocational education funds.
- School counselors could take part in staffings and conferences when appropriate but should not coordinate or chair the staffings, conferences, or IEP meetings.